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## Hearing Silence: Toward a Mixed-Method Approach for Studying Genres' Exclusionary Potential



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**Abstract:** Traditional Rhetorical Genre Study (RGS) methods are not well adapted to study exclusion because excluded information and people are typically absent from the genre, and some excluded information is simply unrelated to the genre because of genre conventions or social context. Within genre-based silences, how can scholars differentiate between an item of silenced information that suggests exclusionary practices and another item that is unrelated to the genre? This article serves as an example of how augmenting RGS with rhetorical listening and silence can benefit our pedagogy, research, and practice. Incorporating exclusion gives a more complete understanding of a genre's social action and responds to cross-cultural issues with genre practices. To illustrate the benefits of this combination, the article draws from the researcher's ongoing inquiry into the construct of the "well-rounded individual" that has become routinized in the U.S. résumé and cover letter.

In mapping the agenda for the next phase of genre studies..., it appears we need to commit ourselves to critical examination of at least the following specific issues: what we might call 'the labor process of genre'; the nature of the sanctioned representations, and their implications for people's lives and experience, moral and material; the degree of accessibility of a genre to potential users, as common resource or as means of exclusion; and genre maintenance as power maintenance. (Freedman and Medway 15)

Twenty years ago, Freedman and Medway observed that rhetorical genre studies (RGS) lacked knowledge of how people might experience exclusion in genres. While some RGS scholars have made significant contributions in explicating exclusion, this effect of genre practices is still underexplored. I posit three reasons for this. First, in efforts to identify genres' social functions, RGS scholars traditionally focus on people who are already part of (or are attempting to become a part of) a genre system and, often, the texts they generate as typified responses to recurrent situations. But excluded information and people are *typically already absent* from the system or text—silent either by choice or by compulsion—making them difficult to trace with standard RGS methods. Further, even when researchers trace what falls outside the system, identifying *meaningful* exclusions can be difficult because genres are defined as much by what they exclude as what they include. These methodological issues derive from the way RGS scholars have adapted their methods to address genres as social actions.

Carolyn Miller's definition of genres as *social actions* refocused RGS research on an inductive, ethnomethodological approach to studying genres (C. Miller 153–155). The shift Miller proposed involved moving away from textual patterns as the sole object of study. Though RGS does examine textual patterns because they are "a 'first-line' argument about whether a group of documents constitutes a genre," textual patterns themselves do not define a "genre" (C. Miller 163). Instead, RGS focuses on the action(s) that a community wants to accomplish by studying the social practices surrounding texts, particularly how writers' and readers' practices of creation, distribution, interpretation, and regulation become routinized responses to typified situations. In fact, genres are often part of chains of typified practices, as work on uptake and genre systems has demonstrated (Freadman, "Anyone for Tennis?"; Freadman, "Uptake?"; Bazerman, "Systems of Genres"; Killoran, "Self-Published"; Winsor, "Genre"; Yates and Orlikowski, "Genre Systems"). Miller's redefinition also moved RGS to an inductive rather than deductive approach. Instead of forcing theoretical taxonomies onto genres (top-down), she suggested that RGS scholars study patterns in how people write, read, and explain their use of genres in order to

open genre categories inductively (bottom-up) based on historical, cultural, and personal motives (Bawarshi; Berkenkotter and Huckin; C. Miller 153–155). As I explain below, these methods have been adapted into a study of *presence* that can overlook what is *absent* (excluded).

In practice, RGS scholars logically applied Miller's concept by ethnographically studying what Berkenkotter and Huckin called "insiders" (2), or people who are already enacting and using particular genre knowledge: e.g., Schryer's work with doctors and insurance denial-letter writers, and Paré and Smart's exploration of novice social workers and bankers ("Observing Genres in Action"). Several studies have examined how members' creation of genre conventions can differentiate a specialty, discourse community, or other social group (Bazerman, *Shaping*; Berkenkotter and Huckin; Henze; Paré and Smart; Swales; Yates and Orlikowski, "Genre Systems"). Others have studied how these conventions, once established, influence current members' motives and indoctrinate new members into the genre (Artemeva and Fox; Artemeva, "Toward a Unified"; Artemeva, "Stories"; Bawarshi; Bazerman, Little, and Chavkin; Blakeslee; Coe, Lingard, and Teslenko; Devitt; Moeller and Christensen; Paré and Smart; Russell; Smart and Brown; Schryer et al.; Winsor; Schryer and Spoel). Studying the people who participate in generic practices, as well as the documents those people create as typified actions, enables researchers to identify—and classify—genres according to the social actions they produce and reflect within a historical and cultural moment without forcing "genre" into a closed taxonomy (C. Miller).

But focusing on insiders creates the first problem for studying exclusion. The routinized practices of writing, reading, and using a particular genre have the effect of excluding certain people and information, as a handful of RGS studies have explored. Bawarshi noted that the genre function "compels individuals to assume certain situational positions, positions established by our culture and rhetorically articulated and reproduced by the genre" (84), often legitimating some writers while excluding others. Schryer, in her separate studies of insurance denial letters and medical case study presentations, explained that writers following genre conventions use genre-specific chronotopes—constructions of time–space—that have the effect of marginalizing readers or patients (Schryer, "Walking"; Schryer et al.). Giltrow considered how the practices of creating and using meta-genres like handbooks might reify ideologies that legitimate some information and groups while excluding other information and groups. Dryer studied the uptakes, which he defined as "readers' and writers' enactment of acquired dispositions toward recurrent textual forms," afforded by the writing and reading of the Municipal Zoning Code of the City of Milwaukee (503). An outcome of these uptakes was a closing of critical discussions about how the zoning codes were created and negotiated, which had the effect of silencing people from poor neighborhoods. His study drew similar conclusions to Barton and Barton about how the practices of creating and publicizing spatial documents like maps can influence citizens' understanding of spatial constraints. Trowse examined the trial of Margery Kempe to illuminate how cultural taboos incorporated into the "preaching genre" had the social outcome of excluding women. Applegarth reclaimed the work of women anthropologists who were excluded from legitimate anthropological positions (research or academic appointments) because the field was concerned about feminization (194). These studies have begun to reveal benefits of focusing on people who experience exclusion as a result of the routinized practices of genre creation and maintenance. Focusing on excluded people enables RGS scholars to understand historical ideologies that still impact genre conventions, as Trowse's discussion of the preaching genre illustrates. It can also make explicit the tacit "negotiations of conflicting interests" that go into creating and maintaining genres, exposing power differentials in genre practices (Coe, Lingard, and Teslenko 200). As I explain in the conclusion of this article, talking to excluded actors can help RGS scholars explore contextual issues that cross-cultural users might face when attempting to enter a genre system, that is, issues *beyond* problems they might have with formulaic textual moves.

A second, practical obstacle to studying exclusion in RGS is that excluded information is often difficult to find. Bazerman acknowledged that the scientist's process of cutting information during the research and writing of an article was impossible to trace without a public record (*Shaping* 200). Trowse had a similar experience, as she recognized that written records of Kempe's trial were essential to her study of how political and cultural forces surrounding the sermon excluded women. In her 2012 paper "Form Alone," Giltrow explored the process of finding and making silences explicit, a process she asserted could enable the field of pragmatics to study context instead of form. She explained how *underdetermination* (tacit assumptions that people draw from contextual cues) can cause issues for legal precedence because original decisions often rely upon tacit assumptions that can fade with history or contextual shifts. In such cases, assumptions and context must be rebuilt by relying on other written documents such as meeting minutes, correspondence, testimony, treaties, and previous court rulings. Without some public record of what or who has been omitted, silences become difficult to trace.

The third issue to studying exclusion is that even when researchers trace what falls outside the system, identifying *meaningful* exclusions can be difficult because genres are defined as much by what they exclude as what they include. Excluding genre-inappropriate information is what Huckin classified as *genre-based silence*, which he attributed as a normal function of actors using genre conventions:

In cases of genre-based silence, (i) certain topics are omitted because of genre conventions; (ii) these genre conventions may vary according to cultural and subcultural norms; (iii) the author may be aware of the omission, but is not using the omission for either communicative or manipulative purposes. (351)

From a genre-based silence perspective, removing genre-inappropriate information is just good rhetorical practice. But the genre-based silence perspective does not critically explore how practices of adopting and using genre conventions designate certain kinds of information “inappropriate.” As I illustrate below, some systematically excluded information suggests underlying structures that have the effect of marginalizing groups. So, within genre-based silences, how can RGS scholars differentiate between an item of silenced information that suggests exclusionary practices and another item that is unrelated to the genre or unnecessary to make explicit because of context?

In my research, I attempted one way that RGS scholars might better answer this question: rhetorically listening to silences in genres. Exclusion is logically linked to silence. Sometimes the uptakes afforded by the reading and writing practices encouraged by genre conventions have the effect of excluding—and silencing—certain groups (Dryer). Just as often, though, people choose to silence certain information so they can join a genre system; Bawarshi has also noted this negotiation of power and identity (79). RGS scholars could benefit from noticing how silenced information, accompanied by people’s concerns, fall into patterns that suggest systematic exclusion. As Glenn noted, the technique of rhetorical listening provides a way to foreground and question these silences. Rhetorical listening (discussed below) is a critically reflexive technique for questioning the reasons that people use to support truth claims about what “is” or “should be” (Ratcliffe 33). Genre-based silences can be seen as truth claims based on genre conventions. For example, the claim “Tax forms don’t include drawings” indicates a truth that the speaker feels, and the unstated reasons he/she provides are based on genre conventions about tax forms that probably support the claim. Rhetorical listening disrupts these reasons in an attempt to ascertain whether, and if so how, they might be problematic for some groups.

This article uses the U.S. résumé and cover letter to illustrate this critically reflexive disruption. Reflexively questioning genre-based silences is particularly important for studying the exclusionary potential of high-stakes, dominant genres because exclusion can have long-lasting effects; in the case of the résumé, for example, exclusion could result in delayed earning potential that might compound over a lifetime (Hiemstra et al.). In what follows, I explain how I augmented RGS with Ratcliffe’s technique of rhetorical listening to study how students experience silence while writing a U.S. résumé and cover letter. After a brief discussion of rhetorical silence as outlined by Glenn and rhetorical listening as defined by Ratcliffe, I draw from a portion of my research to illustrate how I used Ratcliffe’s four moves as a “lens” for guiding my analysis of résumés and cover letters. Though silence and rhetorical listening have some natural complements to RGS, their different research goals and foci can provide a creative tension with potential to broaden RGS practice, pedagogy, and research. Through this discussion, I make several arguments:

- RGS can benefit from rhetorically listening to silences;
- Studying the exclusionary effect of genre practices requires reflexively considering people and information that are typically already absent from a genre;
- Meaningful exclusions can be traced by rhetorically listening to patterns in data.

## Intersections: Silence, Rhetorical Listening, and RGS

Silence, rhetorical listening, and RGS are all theories that concern actions: acts of using, maintaining, or breaking silence (or being silenced); acts of listening, refusing to listen, or listening as a technique to question assumptions; and acts of adopting, learning, maintaining, using, and otherwise participating in genres. All three theories point out that although these actions may become habitual or routinized, practicing them serves rhetorical purposes, so explicating those purposes is a goal of all three theories. From these commonalities stem other theoretical overlaps about power, agency, tacit knowledges/ideologies, identification, and actors’ choices. In this section, I explore the nuances in these overlaps; to differentiate among the many meanings of listening, silence, and genres, I use terms like “practices,” “actions,” “theories,” and “technique.”

The literature on rhetorical listening and silence is too broad for me to cover here, but Ratcliffe and Glenn are set apart in silence and listening scholarship by their feminist and critical theoretical foundations: e.g., Moraga and Anzaldúa’s work on boundaries/borders; Nakayama’s discussion of Whiteness as an invisible norm; Villanueva’s exploration of othering; and Butler’s, Lorde’s, and hooks’s challenges to feminist and race theories. In addition to setting them apart, these foundations link rhetorical listening and silence theories, and Glenn and Ratcliffe (in their

coedited collection) further draw together the two theories in a call to include their respective actions (silence, listening) in the rhetorical canon. Though one can listen for more than just silences, and one can detect silence through means other than rhetorical listening, the two theories share a common epistemological core of feminist and critical race theories that have prompted Ratcliffe and Glenn to suggest that silence and rhetorical listening (actions and theories) are naturally paired (Glenn and Ratcliffe). As I explore in the next sections, this critical foundation influenced my stance toward my data, and it also caused some tension when I overlapped silence and rhetorical listening with RGS.

RGS, silence, and rhetorical listening theories share some epistemological assumptions about power and ideologies. Carolyn Miller's seminal article claimed that genres are a point of dynamic interplay between structural power and personal agency, which Schryer elaborated on: "structure and agency are not dialectically opposed poles of opposition but rather in a state of constant co-construction" (Schryer, "Investigating" 40). As has been shown in several studies, people "negotiate agency" (Schryer et al. 63) when they gain enough knowledge about genre practices to be able to use those practices effectively (Berkenkotter and Huckin; Schryer and Spoel; Winsor, "Using Writing"; Yates, Orlikowski, and Okamura). Genre conventions and practices, then, are not one-way impositions upon people; both readers and writers can choose whether to adopt, reify, or resist conventions and practices in order to negotiate agency.

The practice of silence (as forwarded by Glenn) also works in complex ways with power and agency: silence can be imposed upon people by a governing structure, but people can also use silence to protect themselves or gain agency. Though rhetorical silences (as opposed to non-rhetorical silences, like forgetfulness) are definitely linked to power differentials, Glenn explained that silence can sometimes make the powerful feel disempowered: "Even the successful and allegedly empowered, even those with access to the dominant discourse...feel silenced by the knowledge that speech makes one vulnerable" (43). Both silence and RGS theories, then, recognize that their respective actions (genre and silence) are sites of complexly negotiated agency. This two-way exchange simultaneously impacts both the rhetor and audience.

Rhetorical listening, too, has natural links to RGS. Both theories are concerned with uncovering social functions of tacit knowledge. Ratcliffe called tacit knowledges *cultural logics*, which undergird people's claims and arguments: "If a claim is an assertion of a person's thinking, then a cultural logic is a belief system or shared way of reasoning within which a claim may function" (33). This concept resonates with ideological definitions of genres. Coe, Lingard, and Teslenko noted that ideologies are "attitudes, values, and ways of doing" (4), and contemporary RGS scholars accept that genres reify and embody ideologies: "genres are understood as forms of cultural knowledge that conceptually frame and mediate how we understand and typically act within various situations. This view recognizes genres as both organizing and generating kinds of texts and social actions" (Bawarshi and Reiff 4). Both rhetorical listening and RGS theories, then, share the assumption that tacit cultural logics/knowledges exist *and* can be studied.

Perhaps the most obvious overlap is that all three theories emphasize the rhetorical purpose of their respective action: silence, listening, and the purposeful practice of genres. As early as 1972, Scott asserted that silence should be considered a rhetorical move, although he also acknowledged other functions for silence. In an attempt to categorize those functions, Johannesen outlined 21 types of silence. While some are without rhetorical purpose, such as forgetfulness or muteness, *rhetorical* silences are practiced strategically and consciously, and they serve the same myriad purposes as speech. Glenn conceived of silence "as a *rhetoric*, as a constellation of symbolic strategies that (like spoken language) serves many functions" (xi). As with any rhetorical situation, rhetors using silence must predict audience response *and withhold certain information* based on audience and purpose.

Similarly, rhetorical listening differs from other types of listening. Ratcliffe set apart rhetorical listening "as a trope of interpretive invention, that is, as a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture; its purpose is to cultivate conscious identifications in ways that promote productive communication, especially but not solely cross-culturally" (25). Unlike other forms of listening, the practice of rhetorical listening is about opening spaces for self-reflexivity and cross-cultural identifications.

This key word—identification—is at the core of RGS, rhetorical listening, and silence theories. All three theories draw from Burkean concepts of identity, although Ratcliffe argued that Burke's concept of identification lacked discussions of difference that critiqued hegemony (58). To add this critical perspective, she juxtaposed Burke's theory of identification with Fuss's discussion of disidentifications, ultimately theorizing non-identifications. Disidentifications happen when a person identifies with something but then rejects that identification unreflectively (Ratcliffe 62). Non-identifications, on the other hand, are processes of reflection that are necessary for rhetorical listening: they are a space where a person critically considers his/her choices about whether to identify or disidentify (Ratcliffe 72).



Considering this stance of choice, all three theories—RGS, rhetorical listening, and silence—acknowledge that identity and identification are complexly formed between power structures and individual agency. Practices of silence and genres depend upon agents' choices about whether to identify or not identify with a group. These choices give silence and genre practices their rhetorical power. The technique of rhetorical listening, through spaces of non-identification, seeks to locate and explore those choices; thus, it is possible that rhetorical listening can help RGS scholars explore how agents use their knowledge of genre conventions—and silence within those conventions—to identify (or not).

## Tensions and Challenges

While these three theories have natural complements, I encountered some issues that RGS researchers who consider using this combination will benefit from knowing. It would be false to say that these theories are diametrically opposed, but I want to acknowledge some tensions in their goals and accompanying research foci. RGS identifies genres by their social actions instead of their formal features, so RGS research attempts to explain the pragmatic, ostensible purposes that actors want to achieve in their use of a given genre (C. Miller 164). Critical theories, such as silence and rhetorical listening, have a different goal: adding individuals' divergent voices. In the case of silence, this includes adding voices that are already excluded from a system. These different goals impact each theory's research foci: while RGS examines actors' practices of generating, adopting, reifying, modifying, distributing, and uptaking genre conventions, silence theory asks researchers to identify, add, and ultimately understand silenced voices.

Adding silenced voices can enable RGS researchers to collect and interpret information that in-group members might not notice because the practice has become too habitual (Schryer, "Walking" 450). As Giltrow pointed out, this includes contextual information that can help with underdetermination ("Form"). Many RGS scholars have had to clarify *why* a critical perspective on genre is useful (Devitt; Dryer; Freedman and Medway; Giltrow, "Meta-Genre"; Trowse). For example, Schryer argued how a critical RGS could benefit practitioners:

[C]ritical work of genre researchers should consist of studies that uncover these tacit sets of resources, not just to make them more visible, but also to open them up for critique... These practices seem like "common sense" to their users, but once they are opened up for critical reflection, then even their users might want to challenge some of their practices and attendant ideological values. ("Organizational" 45)

My argument is similar to the argument Bawarshi made about identity in genres (25): incorporating diverse voices, which is a goal of critical theories like listening and silence, helps RGS understand genres better. The practices of defining and following genre conventions always require some information to be excluded, as Huckin also pointed out (351). Sometimes, this process has the effect of excluding people (intentionally or not). So, incorporating exclusion into the discussion about a genre more thoroughly explains that genre's multiple social actions. In addition, incorporating exclusion helps RGS scholars better understand how actors resist genre practices. Actors have complex reasons for excluding certain information—or not participating in a genre system at all (a noteworthy example of this is Paré's exploration of Inuit social workers [Genre]). Adding silenced voices gives participants agency to express their reasons for not "going along with" genre conventions. Although the research focus changes slightly, the overall goal remains intact: understanding genres and genre systems as social actions.

A second issue to using rhetorical listening alongside RGS is that implementing rhetorical listening can prove challenging. Rhetorical listening, as Ratcliffe defined it, is not a method; it is a "technique," which doesn't help explain how it works. I prefer to think of it as Harding did of feminism in methodology: as an overlay atop more traditional methods. Methods are "techniques for gathering evidence" (Harding 2). Once data is gathered, a researcher can use critical theories to interpret the data—Harding called this a "lens" through which to consider data. Even though "listening to (or interrogating) informants" is one of the three categories of evidence-gathering methods (Harding 2; see also Trainor, Middleton), rhetorical listening also includes methods of textual analysis (K. Miller), historical analysis (Tompkins), and reflexive observations of classroom practices (Middleton, Sassi and Thomas; Ratcliffe). All these cases used a traditional qualitative method to gather the data, and then the researchers applied rhetorical listening techniques to "hear" identifications/disidentifications in the data.

Similar to these scholars, I overlaid rhetorical listening atop traditional qualitative methods. My larger study draws from three research sites:

- A large research university in a mid-sized Southwest city (approximately 35,000 students; city population approximately 250,000)
- A private liberal arts college in an urban Western city (approximately 3,500 students; city population

approximately one million)

- A small community college in a rural city of the same Western state as the liberal arts college (approximately 1,500 students; city population approximately 15,000)

At the research university and the liberal arts college, I conducted interviews and focus groups with nine Chinese students, one French student, and 53 U.S. students from various backgrounds (Latino, African American, Asian American, White). I also interviewed 20 U.S. career counselors and instructors from all three sites (see Appendix for focus group and interview protocols). I surveyed 25 students from the research university and liberal arts college, and I have conducted artifact analyses of Chinese and U.S. students' résumés at those sites.

To overlay rhetorical listening atop these traditional methods, I listened to data during analysis and re-questioned data during new phases of the study (a process I detail below). This process shifted amongst Ratcliffe's four "moves" that a rhetorical listener can use:

1. Promoting an *understanding* of the self and other
2. Proceeding with an *accountability* logic
3. Locating identifications across *commonalities* and *differences*
4. Analyzing *claims* as well as *cultural logics* within which these claims function (26, emphasis in original)

Ratcliffe noted that the four moves can be made in any order. This happened in my inquiry, as I rearranged and iteratively applied her moves (see Table 1). The first move asks listeners to "stand under" their own discourses, constantly questioning how their own assumptions might impact themselves and others (28). To this end, I purposely spoke to people who are typically outside the U.S. résumé and cover letter system: international students. As I spoke to them, I listened for information that disrupted my expectations; as I detail in the below discussion, students' stories of silence caused those disruptions. Once I heard disruptions, I checked for commonalities and differences amongst students' experiences: asking other participants to comment on previous students' feedback and/or building iterative questions into the protocols. In the case of silence, this process specifically led to the interview question, "What do you remove (or have been told to remove) from your résumé and cover letter, and why?" This question helped me explore the un-said in these texts. To ascertain claims and cultural logics, I iteratively moved through the steps of gathering and analyzing my data, comparing it to scholarly literature, and member-checking my analysis with participants. Ratcliffe's second move happened toward the end of my study; as I located potential cultural logics, I considered their silencing potential—and how I reified those tacit, exclusionary values in my teaching.

Table 1. My Steps and Ratcliffe's Corresponding Moves.

My Steps	Corresponded to Racliffe's Moves
1. Listen for experiences that confront my own assumptions and expectations	Move One
2. Compare that information to other students' experiences <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Check for patterns in already collected data</li><li>b. Ask participants to comment on previous data</li></ol>	Move Three
3. Locate cultural logics: iteratively <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. gather data,</li><li>b. analyze it for patterns,</li><li>c. compare those patterns to scholarly literature, and</li><li>d. member-check my analysis with participants</li></ol>	Move Four
4. Consider the problematic potential of these cultural logics	Move Two

As I explore in the beginning of the next section, few résumé studies have critically explored how disempowered applicants experience tacit exclusionary values. To demonstrate what such an inquiry might look like, I illustrate my process for using rhetorical listening by drawing from interviews and focus groups with six Chinese students at the private liberal arts college. I intersperse my discussion with data from subsequent interviews with career counselors, instructors, and Chinese and U.S. students from all three of my research sites. The examples trace how I "heard" and pursued the rhetorical construct of the well-rounded individual, which arose from patterns in participants' discussions about writing or teaching U.S. résumés (as I discuss further in the next section). Ultimately, this illustration serves two purposes: 1) to explicate my procedures for augmenting RGS with rhetorical listening and silence, and 2) to contrast the results of that process with traditional résumé and RGS studies.

## An Illustration: Listening for Systematic Silences in the Résumé

Most résumé studies concentrate on the résumé's ostensible purpose: to garner an interview. To examine this purpose, résumé studies largely focus on the desires and actions of the powerful—the employers. This focus has led to substantial popular and scholarly literature on the “dos and don'ts” of writing, designing, and submitting résumés (Brown; Cole et al.; Hutchinson and Brefka; Jones; Potvin; Priest; Schullery, Ickes, and Schullery). Some studies from the social sciences have examined hiring discrimination, but they are statistical studies of employers' biases rather than qualitative explorations of applicants' experiences (Bertrand and Mullainathan; Cotton, O'Neill, and Griffin; Park et al.; Watson, Appiah, and Thornton; Widner and Chicoine). Linguistic analyses of cross-cultural résumés primarily focus on textual “moves” that writers make in order to provide guidelines for cross-cultural writing (Connor et al.; Connor). In attempting to demystify the occluded hiring processes, these studies miss the experiences of disempowered applicants.

RGS scholars, partly for methodological reasons, have not done much better at focusing on how cultural practices of the U.S. résumé might exclude people. RGS scholars have used the résumé to illustrate genre network systems and “destabilizations” in genre systems, genre-based silence, the purpose of genre, and “specialized genre situations” (Bazerman, “Systems”; Selber; Huckin; Yates, Orlikowski, and Okamura; Henze 418). Killoran provided a deeper analysis of the résumé when he drew upon genre systems theory to explore the consequences of the résumé's migration from print to online formats (“Self-Published”; “Situations”). But in RGS studies, only Popken noted the exclusionary potential of résumé conventions when he observed that “Forbidden topics include almost anything about the candidate's home life, non-work interest, or philosophy of life....” (“Pedagogical” 93). He noted that “rules of exclusion—or, as I will call them, ‘exclusionary features’—exist within the very fabric of the genre” (“Pedagogical” 93):

- length constraints
- tabulated bloc format
- specific labels: e.g., education, experience, and references
- subjectless sentences
- self as “an amalgam of facts” (Popken, “The Pedagogical” 104–105)

Popken advanced the understanding that textbook writers' uptake of résumé and cover letter conventions built exclusion “within the very fabric of the genre.” However, his analysis focused primarily on how textbooks from 1914 to 1939 perpetuated résumé genre conventions by reprocessing models from other textbooks (Popken, “Pedagogical”). As such, his discussion about exclusion is limited to formal textual features, which missed both people's experiences of genre practices as well as the rhetorical constructs underpinning those textual features.

*Rhetorical constructs*, as I am using the term here, are structures that rhetors use to make claims more legitimate within cultural logics. For example, spatial constructs can reveal cultural ideologies about who “owns” space (Barton and Barton; Dryer). A particular construct of time–space could result from—and reify—cultural attitudes: Schryer et al.'s study discussed how the chronotopes that medical practitioners adopted in medical case study presentations suggested doctors' attitudes about patients. A rhetorical construct is not an ideology. It is a tool (e.g., a persona or chronotope) that rhetors can select to *match* a certain ideology. These ideologies are often tacit (silent) and hegemonic (silencing), and they are eventually made to seem “natural” within genre practices (Paré). Consequently, their associated rhetorical constructs become naturalized and exclusionary.

I draw from a portion of my data to illustrate how rhetorically listening to student applicants' experiences allowed me to better explore one rhetorical construct, the “well-rounded individual.” This construct arose from patterns in participants' explanations about advice they received or guidance they gave during the process of writing or teaching a “good” U.S. résumé. According to patterns in my data, the well-rounded individual is marked by a balance between work, school, and civic engagement. Ostensibly, it incorporates more personal information than Popken found. However, discussions of home life are still forbidden, and Popken's “philosophy of life” information is indirectly gleaned from “non-work life” items (like hobbies) that applicants include. As my discussions with career counselors and students indicated, though, “non-work life” is not quite accurate. According to career counselors I spoke to, hobbies or interests the applicant includes should still be tailored to what an employer wants, as exemplified in this quote from a career counselor:

Typically what our alumni employers tell us, GPA is important, yes, but that's not the only indicator of success. So they look for people that are well rounded, that have experiences in a lot of different areas. They want to see people that have been leaders, not just someone who's gone back to their dorm room and played video games after class. (January 2014)

As this counselor's assertion implies, any non-work items (e.g., interests or hobbies) on the résumé should actually relate to work—unrelated personal interests are undesirable. These assertions blur the boundary between non-work and work, and the “undesirable” aspect, as I explore more deeply below, has exclusionary implications.

Ratcliffe's four moves helped me reflexively consider how this construct had become naturalized (for me) in my practices of using and teaching résumés and cover letters. Cunliffe defines reflexivity as a “turning back” and “questioning of truth claims, language, texts, and ways in which we theorize about the world” (38). She argues that reflexively engaging in dialogue with others or oneself can help people understand “tacit assumptions and ideologies that substitute in our ways of talking, explore how our own actions, conversational practices, and ways of making sense...may create and be sustained by particular ways of relating and by implicit and explicit power relationships” (38). Her point resonates with Ratcliffe's first move of reflexively “standing under” one's own discourse. Reflexive dialog and listening promote understanding of how “tactic assumptions and ideologies” create power differentials and impact those without power. They open a place of self-reflection and critical examination of one's own assumptions.

So, even though the below illustration draws heavily from Chinese students' input, my intent is not to draw generalizations about Chinese culture or even Chinese students who live in the U.S. Rather, it represents an attempt to reflexively examine the rhetorical constructs I reify when teaching my U.S. students about the genre of the résumé. Each of the below excerpts demonstrates a point at which Chinese students' expressions of curiosity, frustration, and/or agency confronted my own assumptions about what makes a “good” résumé. Using their input, the later stages of my research have attempted to explore how other students (including U.S. students) might have similar *and* different experiences.

Penny<sup>[1]</sup>, a Chinese student in one of my first focus groups at the liberal arts college, raised an initial point that confronted my ideas of “good” résumés:

I think the other point that American people really care about is your volunteer work during your college life. I think that's also a huge difference between American and China 'cause we don't really do volunteer work during weekends. We really go out like for a picnic or something; we don't really care about others. But here in the U.S. you have to do—or not, you *have* to do, but you're willing to do help.... So, yeah I think that American people really care about your experience with volunteer work. That's also a reflection of your teamwork and leadership stuff. (April 2012, emphasis in original)

Many Chinese students brought up this point. Resisting the urge to label this a “Chinese” cultural logic, I instead used this information to reflexively apply Ratcliffe's first move. I heard a push to have U.S. students volunteer, which was later echoed when I compared Chinese and U.S. students' experiences to detect commonalities and differences (Ratcliffe's third move). In my interviews and focus groups, nearly all U.S. students had (or planned to obtain) volunteer experience, and all 20 U.S. career counselors and instructors I interviewed emphasized that having these extracurricular positions is “important” for students (although, as I discuss below, there is a class-based perspective to this argument). Chinese and U.S. students all received advice about needing volunteer, student leadership, and internship positions. However, each group experienced this advice differently: for U.S. students, it was affirmation of their earlier work in these positions; but the Chinese students lacked this work, so they experienced this advice with anxiety.

Most students could not explain *why* these positions were important—only that they *were* important. So, to explore underlying cultural logics (Ratcliffe's fourth move), I delved into scholarship and used iterative questions in interviews with career counselors and instructors. I found several articles that discussed how extracurricular (volunteer, student leadership, and internship) positions were important to proving a student was “well rounded.” For example, Rubin, Bommer, and Baldwin statistically correlated extracurricular activity and initiative, teamwork, communication, and decision-making. They noted that “Career counselors, student advisors and recruiters commonly impress on students the importance of being ‘well-rounded’ and the dangers of being perceived by recruiters as one dimensional or just ‘book smart’” (441). The presence of extracurricular activity serves as “proof” of a multidimensional character—in more colloquial terms, a “well-rounded individual.”

My subsequent interviews with career counselors and instructors both complicated and corroborated this view. While all 20 emphasized that extracurricular activities were important, 16 of them asserted that including extracurricular positions was more about demonstrating skills or building networks rather than a well-rounded personality, particularly in fields where internships are required to obtain licensure or technical experience. But all 20 of them, unprompted, used the term “well rounded” to describe an ideal applicant's personality. When I asked them to explain what they meant by “well rounded,” several career counselors noted that extracurricular positions demonstrate that an applicant can “think beyond him/herself” and is willing to contribute to society in ways other



than work. One business professor directly linked extracurricular positions with personality and well roundedness, stating that these positions demonstrate that an applicant is

well rounded—that they have interests outside of school... An insight into their personality. If I hire someone, I'm going to work with them and I have to like them—to be blunt. You obviously want the best qualified, but if one is slightly more qualified but would be a pain... and the other person has more human relations skills, you'll hire the second person. (August 2013)

So, even though an attempt to construct the well-rounded individual might not be the *only* reason to provide extracurricular positions on the résumé, displaying a well-rounded personality is considered a reason for including these positions. Considering instructors' complicating perspectives, I decline to call the well-rounded individual a cultural logic or an ideology, per se. It is more contingent than either of those terms imply. However, it does seem to be a rhetorical construct: it is a persona that applicants strategically build if/when the context demands it, assuming they are able to obtain the appropriate experiences necessary to build it (an issue I discuss later).

At this point in my analysis, I turned to a logic of accountability (Ratcliffe's second move) to explore potential exclusionary ramifications of the well-rounded individual. Stampnitzky's examination of Harvard University's admissions standards illuminated this discussion. She focused on debates surrounding Harvard's changing admission standards from 1945 to 1965, when Harvard had the chance to move to merit-based admissions but instead chose to admit applicants based on "character" and "personality." She found that in the case of Harvard during that period, the evaluation of character and personality was based upon cultural values that were homophobic, elitist, and misogynistic. The ideal applicant was a "healthy, normal, well-rounded American boy" while the undesirable applicant was a "pansy" or "grade chaser" (Bender qtd. in Stampnitzky 473–474).

After consulting this scholarship, I returned to the Chinese students' data and laid it beside Stampnitzky's analysis (again, Ratcliffe's third move). The well-rounded individual construct became particularly salient as I listened to how Chinese students felt the "grade chaser" stigma. On several occasions, they remarked that they felt Chinese résumés were more straightforward because applicants could rely upon grades and test scores. For example, consider this conversation among three of the focus group participants:

Paul: I think in China when they go through the résumés they have some guidelines. Like, uh, the English label, like the GMAT, GRE, or TOEFL's grades.... When you meet that line you can get a interview or you can't.

Paige: And also your GPA stuff, right?

Penny: Yeah, we have to include the GPA in the résumé, but I don't think they really care about the GPA in the U.S.

Paige (later): So the problem is... the Chinese résumé it's easy because your outstanding point probably can be your GPA, but in the U.S. version, your GPA cannot—never will be outstanding 'cause they don't care about that. (April 2012)

It is worth noting that students' assumptions about employer expectations are often inaccurate; three career counselors I interviewed noted that some employers really do care about GPA—in one instance, to the counselor's chagrin. But reflexively listening to this conversation highlights where the U.S. has built a polarity between "grade chaser" and "well-rounded individual." Stampnitzky noted that Bourdieu predicted "education, specifically as a social institution, and educational capital, as a means of advancement, are particularly attractive to those from the relatively dominated and stigmatized sectors of society..." (473). Stampnitzky's point is that "grade chasers" often come from working-class or impoverished homes, and the rhetorical construct of the well-rounded individual was built, at least in part, to prevent these social classes from filling Harvard's Ph.D. programs (473). Students mitigate the grade-chaser stigma by downplaying (or silencing entirely) their GPA achievements and augmenting it with extracurricular experiences; this can be a difficult transition for students who come from backgrounds where GPA is valued and extracurricular opportunities are limited, such as the Chinese students in my study.

These values can trickle into the workforce when conventional academic admissions expectations influence human resource recruiters' expectations for the genres of the résumé and cover letter. Rivera studied the hiring practices of elite employers (law and finance) at three companies. One of her findings was that elite employers recruit from "super-elite" colleges (like Harvard) because those colleges' admission standards acted as pre-screens for students' sociability, motivation, and intelligence:

Evaluators relied so intensely on "school" as a criterion of evaluation not because they believed that

the content of elite curricula better prepared students for life in their firms...but rather due to the strong cultural meanings and character judgments evaluators attributed to *admission* and *enrollment* at an elite school. (78, emphasis in original)

In addition, Rivera found a complex relation to the well-rounded individual in these organizations: recruiters preferred applicants whose extracurricular activities were similar to the recruiter's. She noted how these preferences could prove problematic for students who are unable to obtain these "matching" extracurricular activities:

In addition to the immediate expense of valued pursuits (e.g., equipment, forgone earnings, travel costs), many of the activities prized by evaluators required long periods of concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2003), often beginning in childhood, that required investments not only by job candidates but also by their parents. ...potential socio-economic biases were exacerbated by the fact that evaluators tended to prefer activities that were associated with white, upper-middle class culture. (83)

Though Rivera's study focused only on elite employers' relationship to super-elite colleges, her work still has value for understanding how the cultural exclusivity of the well-rounded individual can move from academic admissions to the workforce as recruiters uptake standards from academic admissions into the résumé and cover letter.

Stampnitzky's and Rivera's examinations highlight how the well-rounded individual can have the effect of marginalizing groups who do not have opportunities for extracurricular activities. In my study, lack of access was not exclusive to the Chinese students. Career counselors and instructors I interviewed explained that some working-class U.S. students could not afford to give up an unskilled, paying job in order to obtain an unpaid internship or volunteer position that might be more relevant to their intended career. One counselor admitted that this might slow these students' entrance into their chosen careers because they might need extra years to accumulate that experience (January 2014).

There is some research to corroborate the counselor's observation. In a study out of the Netherlands, Hiemstra et al. found that non-Western minority students (Turkey, Morocco, Surinam and the Dutch Antilleans) were less likely to report extracurricular activity than their Dutch majority counterparts. This led potential employers to find those minority students less desirable for employment (Hiemstra et al.; see also Nemanik and Clark). Hiemstra et al. posited that this could compound over years and result in delayed entrance into higher paying positions (19). A lack of access to such positions has rhetorical consequences because the audience, per genre practices, expects students to exhibit well-roundedness based on these types of positions.

Most students in my interviews, though, had some sort of access to extracurricular opportunities. Chinese students acknowledged that they had access to student clubs in college, so they had some opportunity to obtain extracurricular experience. But even with this access, another point the Chinese students made complicates the well-rounded individual even further: the extracurricular activity needs to be "correct." Two Chinese students, Penny and Patrick (interviewed at different schools), noted that they removed student leadership positions that were affiliated with China's Communist Party (April 2012; January 2014). In China, these positions are important because Chinese students who want to become members of China's Communist Party join certain clubs throughout their academic lives. Several Chinese students explained that being part of China's Communist Party was beneficial to obtaining jobs in China, so students who have little (or no) political interests often join the party for economic reasons. Penny was told to remove the leadership role from her résumé, and Patrick removed it from his résumé when he came to the U.S.

Even when they have access to extracurricular opportunities, the opportunities need to be "appropriate" in order to be used effectively on a résumé. Paige noted something similar when she discussed the club that she and her Chinese classmates had formed at the U.S. college they attended:

And one point [the career counselor] mentioned is we need to show that we are connected to the American cultural—American society. As for Chinese club, we need not only to provide information about "we hold a ceremony for our festival," we need to like provide some information we communicate with the American students ... (April 2012)

In a similar way to how GPA was not enough to demonstrate the well-rounded individual, students' extracurricular activities were not enough unless they signaled American affiliations and values. Patty, another Chinese student, reported that she removed paid work she had done in China (March 2014). She explained the "naturalness" of silencing this information because a U.S. audience would not recognize the organizations' names. These stories highlight how political and economic forces that influence the résumé can have exclusionary consequences for students who lack "appropriate"—in this case, American—activities.

I want to emphasize here that not all students expressed frustration with removing (silencing) certain information on their résumés. With the exception of Penny, most students felt empowered by knowing how to “tailor” a résumé to a specific organization’s expectations. Patrick, when discussing removal of his Communist affiliation, asserted that it was “good” and “normal” to make those choices on his résumé. In one focus group, U.S. students repeatedly used derivations of the word “pride” to describe how they felt about their tailored résumés (April 2012). Tailoring includes emphasizing *and* silencing certain positions based upon predictions about what an employer might want. In RGS terms, these students were learning how to use silence in ways that followed genre conventions and signaled in-group status. So, several students felt proud that they used silence effectively.

For other students, choosing between performing the well-rounded individual and mitigating discrimination created a double bind. Including “inappropriate” extracurricular activities threatens to expose students to discriminatory hiring practices. But removing these items to avoid discrimination makes them appear less well-rounded and less appealing for hire (Himestra et al.; Nemanick Jr. and Clark). As David Russell explains, when enough people’s identities and motives are at cross-purposes in a genre, such double-binds may cause the genre to rupture (523). The résumé and cover letter show no signs of rupture as yet, suggesting two possibilities. First, as Russell points out, double binds happen when genre practices are on the cusp of change; so, it is possible that an influx of Chinese students might cause a shift in the U.S. résumé and cover letter genre. Second, and more probable, this rupture has not happened *because* these Chinese students occupy a disempowered position; and the roles set by routinized practices of the résumé have always included a disempowered contingent of actors (applicants in general, and especially marginalized groups). In this case, the Chinese students’ experiences highlight how constructs like the well-rounded individual can work as filters for actors who might occupy those disempowered roles. For students who lack access to “appropriate” experiences that will enable them to demonstrate the well-rounded individual, this rhetorical construct has an exclusionary social effect.

Iteratively moving through Ratcliffe’s four moves enabled me to critically analyze the data that I gathered with traditional methods. But rhetorical listening became an overlay in a second way: guiding the questions I asked over the course of my inquiry. I built progressively more direct questions; for example, I asked career counselors whether their students expressed concerns about discrimination. I posed these direct questions late in my interview and focus group protocols so as not to influence responses, but iteratively including them allowed me to re-question previously heard information and to hear similar experiences.

Comparing my illustration with traditional RGS studies should highlight how rhetorical listening might extend RGS’s understanding of exclusion. Using rhetorical listening and silence as a complement to RGS allowed me to “hear” *systematic* exclusions in the way actors understand and follow résumé and cover letter conventions—in the example I explore here, patterned around race and political affiliation. Students experienced silence primarily in things they kept silent and things they were advised to keep silent. It also included things they could not report because they lack access to opportunities (e.g., internships), which becomes rhetorical when audiences expect students to report such positions.

Talking to participants, rhetorically listening to their silences, and allowing data to iteratively guide successive methods and analyses allowed me to listen to how the well-rounded individual became a locus of students’ curiosity, frustration, marginalization, and agency. They omitted or altered experiences because of concerns about being excluded from a job if they revealed inappropriate information. Complexly, their main concern about silencing information was that they might cut something an employer wants, thereby making themselves less attractive to an employer. But even some students who had concerns about cutting important information noted that their ability to use silence “effectively” (in ways they saw as relevant or effective) made them feel that they had a “good” résumé. While constructing a well-rounded individual that would be appropriate to their genre situation, students experienced silence in complicated ways.

## Conclusion: Benefits of these Combined Approaches

Rhetorical listening and silence are not *the only* way to study exclusion, and the process I detailed above is certainly not the only way to conduct such an inquiry. But combining these methods with RGS approaches has potential benefits that make it worth exploring, replicating, and complicating. The most obvious benefit, given the example in this article, is for intercultural exchanges. Colleges in the U.S. are seeing more international students, particularly from China (“Open Doors Data”). Instructors are increasingly teaching across intercultural and international boundaries, and their scholarship has reflected more intercultural issues because of it (e.g., Bosley; Dautermann; Ding and Savage; Hunsinger; Bokor; Matsuda; Nguyen and Miller; Parette, McNair, and Holloway-Attaway; St. Amant). Additionally, U.S. businesses and NGOs are expanding their international employment. These exchanges become potentially contested spaces of cultural logics; but, as my study suggests, disempowered

actors (in this case, student writers) sometimes use silence to adapt to genre conventions.

“Intercultural” does not necessarily mean “international.” Scollon, Scollon, and Jones and Appadurai forwarded culture as a verb: not *somewhere* a person inhabits, but *something* that person does. Instead of being tied to physical locations, “intercultural” is what happens when someone moves from one set of values, discourse communities, or technologies into another set; in RGS terms, such a movement *genres* an actor. Genre, as a verb, is when rhetors appropriate genre practices to move amongst social situations while, in the process, being indoctrinated into those practices (Artemeva and Freedman; Schryer, “Power”). Genre-ing can have the effect of disjuncture and exclusionary silences: e.g., when a U.S. minority student attempts to enter the U.S. workforce. Davis and Muir explored strategies that U.S. minority students used to mitigate discrimination on their résumés; these included using less ethnic-sounding nicknames, changing their mailing addresses, omitting their affiliation with civil rights groups, and silencing skills that might reveal their ethnicity (e.g., Spanish fluency). In my study, I also heard reports of students using these strategies to silence ethnic information, including a student who used initials instead of his “Muslim-sounding” name. Many U.S. businesses and colleges are experiencing intra-national cultural fluctuations as well as international ones, and they need to adapt their genre expectations and practices to respond to disjuncture that might occur. Recognizing tacit cultural logics involved in the creation and maintenance of genre conventions can help organizations confront these issues while also helping writers effectively move amongst cultures, whether internationally or intra-nationally.

As RGS becomes increasingly intercultural, it could use a method for exploring cultural logics that might prove problematic for cross-cultural movements (Bazerman, Bonini, and Figueiredo). Though cultural logics are contextual, positing and publicizing them can help practitioners and instructors reflexively question the values we reify in the ways we adopt, distribute, and teach genre conventions. Such questioning could, ideally, lead to useful guidelines for students, instructors, and practitioners who want to cross cultural boundaries. For example, I recently spoke to an admissions advisor at a college that wanted to increase its enrollment of marginalized students. In writing the new admissions application, though, admissions recruiters reified common tropes of the well-rounded individual—volunteer or student leadership positions—that some marginalized students appear to have trouble obtaining. Listening to students’ voices could have helped the admissions committee critically examine their requirements in order to create an application that did not accidentally reify problematic cultural logics.

Even without an intercultural component, incorporating critical theories like rhetorical listening and silence could help future RGS scholars approach other genres more critically. Listening to systematic patterns of silence can help RGS scholars identify genre practices’ exclusionary effects, allowing RGS research to explore people or information that is typically already absent from the genre. Such a research agenda would add participants’ voices of frustration, curiosity, resistance, and agency as they encounter tacit ideologies; and it would help RGS scholars, teachers, and practitioners reflexively consider those ideologies. If genres are social *actions*, as Carolyn Miller and many scholars since have asserted, the exclusionary actions of genre practices are equally powerful as actions of functionality (or dysfunctionality). Drawing connections between RGS, silence, and rhetorical listening could give RGS scholars a way to critically examine the mechanisms and consequences of exclusion, which could better inform pedagogy, practice, and research.

## Appendix: Interview and Focus Group Protocols

### ***INTERVIEW Script and Questions for Students***

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am hoping that you would volunteer approximately an hour of your time to answer a few questions about your experience writing résumés and cover letters. I am interested in your opinions about the process, including any successes, frustrations, or concerns you might have had while creating one. This is voluntary, and you can quit at any time.

Because I cannot type as fast as you can talk, I will be audio recording our interview, but the audio file will be destroyed after I have transcribed it. I will not be asking you any identifying information, but any that accidentally makes it onto the tape will be “scrubbed” when I transcribe the audio file.

You can keep the information sheet that I emailed you. It includes contact information of the researchers. If you feel prepared to continue with this study, please sign this consent form [*hand them the consent form*], and we will start the interview.

*So, the first questions are to gather contextual information about you. Answer them as best you can without giving identifying information (your name, your institution, etc.).*



1. What is your level at college?
2. What is your major?
3. How many times have you written a résumé and cover letter?
4. What types of positions have you written a résumé and cover letter for (for example, internships, college applications, professional jobs, etc.)?
  - a. *If the student is international, whether they have created a résumé and cover letter for a U.S. position—critical for inclusion criteria*
5. How many jobs or internships have you had?

*Thanks. Now, let's talk about your experiences creating job materials (résumés and cover letters) for these positions.*

6. Where do you go for advice about job materials?
  - a. Internet, textbooks, teachers, career counselors, family, etc.
  - b. *Follow-up: what internet sites, specifically? What textbooks have you used? What classes have you taken?*
7. Have you ever received advice that you didn't follow? If so, what and why?
8. Tell me about the steps you take to write your job materials. Do you just reprocess old materials?
  - c. (If the student had one from another country, did he/she notice any differences between it and the U.S. one?)
9. How do you feel about the process? Does anything not "make sense" about it? Is there anything that you often struggle with? Is there anything about writing them that makes you "uncomfortable" (for example, a lot of students are concerned about "bragging")?

*Now I'm going to ask you to explain why you make certain decisions on your résumé. So, give me your reasons behind your decisions. They can be reasons that you thought of OR advice that other people have given you.*

10. What sort of things do you include (or have been told to include) on your résumé?
11. Have you ever been advised NOT to include something on your résumé? If so, what?
12. What *criteria* do you use to include/NOT include certain items on your résumé and cover letter? These can be criteria/reasons you thought of or advice that someone has given you. (e.g., relevance, personality, discriminatory concerns)
  - a. (If "relevance" comes up in the previous answers): *what do you mean by "relevance"? That is, how do you know when something is "relevant"?*
  - b. *If "personality" comes up: is it just about personality, or is it also about skills? Is it about both or just one? Are there other reasons that you might include something?*
  - c. *If they're having trouble: why do you usually include something on your résumé? Why do you usually remove something?*
13. Have you ever included something because you thought it showed your personality? If not, why not? If so, what? And why?
14. Have you ever removed something from your résumé because you were concerned about how an employer would perceive it? If so, what and why?
15. Do you have any questions about résumés and cover letters? What questions do you still have about the process or the writing?
16. Is there anything (else) you feel instructors or career counselors should know when helping students create résumés and cover letters?

### ***INTERVIEW Script and Questions for Instructors and Career Counselors***

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I would like to ask you some questions about your experience giving students advice on what to include on their résumés. I am working on a research study and hope that you would volunteer 30 minutes to an hour of your time to answer a few questions. This is voluntary, and you can quit at any time.

Because I cannot type as fast as you can talk, I will be audio recording our interview, but the audio file will be destroyed after I have transcribed it. I will not be asking you any identifying information, but any that accidentally makes it onto the tape will be "scrubbed" when I transcribe the audio file.

You can keep the information sheet that I have emailed you. It includes contact information of the researchers. If you feel prepared to continue with this study, please sign this consent form [*hand them the consent form*], and we will start the interview.

\* \* \* \* \*

*First, I would like to collect some contextual information about your experience.*

1. Without giving specific details about your position, please explain your professional experience in giving students advice about résumés and cover letters. How long have you been doing it? How do you view your role when working with the students?
2. Tell me about your training in résumés. Where did you originally learn about them? And where do you usually go for updated information? In other words, what knowledge base do you use when advising students? (*For example, were you trained as part of a degree program, or were you part of an HR team, or do you have a favorite website or book that you use?*)
3. Roughly how many students have you worked with to help create résumés?

*The rest of these questions will pertain to your current position.*

4. Does your institution/program require students to volunteer, intern, or hold student leadership positions before they graduate? Why or why not?
5. What trends have you noticed in students' decisions to include information on their résumés?
6. What advice do you usually give students about including items on their résumés? In other words, what criteria do you use for including items on their résumés?

*Follow-up: Do you ever recommend that they include these items to demonstrate personality? If so: What do you think it demonstrates about their personality?*

7. In your experience, what reasons do students give for NOT including things on their résumés? Please explain how frequently you hear each reason.
  - a. *Have you ever given students advice to not include something? If so, can you give me an example of something (positions) you've told them to take out of their résumé?*
8. In your experience, have you found factors that prevent students from obtaining experiences? If so, how prevalent an issue do you think this is/these are for the students you work with? Please explain. (*for interviewer only if needed: e.g., availability of positions in your area or socioeconomic status of the students you work with*)
9. Have students voiced concerns about including certain information on their résumés? What were those concerns?
10. *Follow-up to #8 and #9, if affirmative response:* How big (prevalence or intensity) of an issue have you found this factor/these factors to be for the students you work with?

## **FOCUS GROUP Script and Questions for Students**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am hoping that you would volunteer about an hour-and-a-half of your time to answer a few questions about your experience writing résumés and cover letters. I am interested in your opinions about the process, including any successes, frustrations, or concerns you might have had while creating one. This is voluntary, and you can quit at any time.

Because I cannot type as fast as you can talk, I will be audio recording our interview, but the audio file will be destroyed after I have transcribed it. I will not be asking you any identifying information, but any that accidentally makes it onto the tape will be "scrubbed" when I transcribe the audio file.

You can keep the information sheet that I have emailed you. It includes contact information of the researchers. If you feel prepared to continue with this study, please sign this consent form [*hand them the consent form*], and we will start the interview.

*The first questions are to gather contextual information about you. Please answer them without giving me any identifying information (your name, the name of this institution, etc.).*

Tell me a little about yourself:

1. What is your level at college?
2. What is your major?
3. What types of positions have you written a résumé and cover letter for (for example, internships, college applications, professional jobs, etc.)?
  - a. (If the student is international, whether they have created a résumé and cover letter for a U.S. position—this will be critical for inclusion criteria)
4. Approximately how many times have you written a résumé and cover letter?

*Thanks. Now, let's talk about your experiences creating job materials (résumés and cover letters) for these positions.*

5. Where do you go for advice about job materials?
  - d. Internet, textbooks, teachers, career counselors, family, etc.
  - e. *Follow-up: what internet sites, specifically? What textbooks have you used? What classes have you taken?*
6. Have you ever received advice that you didn't follow? If so, why?
7. Tell me about the steps you take to write your job materials. Do you just reprocess old materials?
  - f. (If the student had one from another country, did he/she notice any differences between it and the U.S. one?)
8. Tell me about how you feel about the process: Does anything not "make sense" about it? Is there anything that you often struggle with? Is there anything about writing them that makes you "uncomfortable" (for example, some students are concerned about "bragging")?

*Now I'm going to ask you to explain why you make certain decisions on your résumé. So, give me your reasons behind your decisions. They can be reasons that you thought of OR advice that other people have given you.*

9. What sort of things do you include (or have been told to include) on your résumé?
10. Have you ever been advised NOT to include something on your résumé? If so, what and why?
11. What reasons/criteria do you use to include/NOT include certain items on your résumé and cover letter? (e.g., relevance, personality, discriminatory concerns)
  - a. (If "relevance" comes up in the previous answers): what do you mean by "relevance"? That is, how do you know when something is "relevant"?
  - b. If "personality" comes up: is it just about personality, or is it also about skills? Is it about both or just one? Are there other reasons that you might include something?

*Okay, I'm going to ask you to fill out this worksheet, and then we'll talk about your answers. (Hand out the First Questionnaire)*

12. So, you tell me: is personality something that you try to portray? Or is it less important than other things? Or just as important?
  - a. *Follow-up: If you had to "rank" the sort of things you were trying to portray (e.g., skills and personality), what would be more important? Or would they be just as important as each other?*
  - b. *Is there a better word than "personality" to describe this?*
13. For those of you who think it is important, HOW do you convey "personality"? Is it positions that you include, like extracurricular, work related? Or is it something else?
14. Have you ever removed something from your résumé because you were concerned about how an employer would perceive it? If so, what and why?

*Thanks for that. The last two questions are for you...*

15. Do you have any questions about résumés and cover letters? What questions do you still have about the process or the writing?
16. Is there anything (else) you feel instructors or career counselors should know when helping students create résumés and cover letters?

## Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms. ([Return to text.](#))

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